

South Central Region

2002 Annual Performance Report



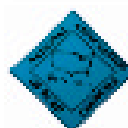
National Association of
Conservation Districts



NRCS Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service



NCDEA



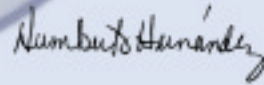
Far beyond the call of duty...

On May 13, 2002, President Bush signed the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 - the 2002 Farm Bill - marking the single most significant commitment of dollars toward conservation in this nation's history. This commitment also represents tremendous opportunities and challenges for our agency and our partners as we implement the provisions in the 2002 Farm Bill.

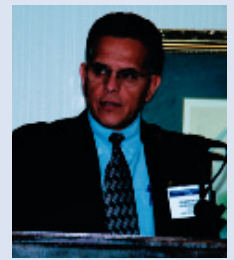
I have already seen the South Central Region employees and partners rise to the challenge, as millions of dollars in the Environmental Quality Incentives and Wetlands Reserve Programs were obligated in a very short time. This was accomplished as our employees and partners spent countless hours to meet or exceed their goals, proving their commitment to conservation. This will ultimately result in conservation on the land. I am proud to be the South Central Regional Conservationist, working with such a dedicated group of individuals. They are truly the backbone of this agency.

This report highlights some of our accomplishments in 2002, but cannot begin to capture the extent of the impact on our natural resources. This is an indication of our dedication to America's need for conservation. I pledge to continue to be an advocate for the field and any assistance related to field office operations. You are the fiber of this agency, and without you, we would not exist.

Again, thank you very much for going far beyond the call of duty...



For more information, visit: www.ftw.nrcs.usda.gov/regional



Humberto Hernandez
Regional Conservationist

Our mission is to provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

The South Central Region comprises 15 percent of the nation's land area, encompassing many agricultural and urban areas, terrain types, and plant and animal species, with their associated natural resource-related concerns. It is our duty to provide our customers with the best science and service, despite varied circumstances. In this vein, we are working to ensure our conservation planners are not only qualified, but also certified to provide our customers the best possible product, and the taxpayers the best possible return on their investment.

Grazing Land Management Schools

Increasing the quality and quantity of technical assistance on grazing lands is a primary interest in the South Central Region. Grazing lands comprise more than 50% of the land surface in this region and more than 25% of the grazing lands in the United States. Several initiatives are underway in support of the effort to increase the availability of technical assistance on these lands.



All four states in the region conducted Grazing Land Management Schools for the owners and managers of grazing lands. A total of seven schools were conducted and each of the schools emphasized a different aspect of grazing land management. More than 500 people, including more than 400 producers, attended the schools. Participants came from each state in the region as well as from Alabama, Colorado, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, and Mexico.

Ecological Site Descriptions

Ecological Site Descriptions and Forage Suitability Group Descriptions are comprehensive evaluations of the relationships among soils, plants, animals, water and other resources on a specific site.

A regional task team has been established to help coordinate the development of these descriptions in the region, furthering our understanding and utilization of these sites to provide technical assistance. NRCS is working cooperatively with the Department of Defense, The Nature Conservancy, Texas A&M, Oklahoma State University, Agricultural Research Service, the Grazing Lands Technology Institute and private vendors to complete the assessments.



Farm Bill Programs Performance

South Central Region personnel worked feverishly to implement the 2002 Farm Bill and simultaneously invested more than \$144 Million in natural resource protection and restoration funds. To say "mission accomplished" is a gross understatement for the amount of work that went into getting these program funds obligated and used in a manner that maximizes conservation benefits. The following table illustrates the FY 2002 investment that was used to accomplish conservation successes in specific NRCS Programs in the South Central Region.

FY 2002 Program Investment - Conservation Applied					
	Texas	Oklahoma	Louisiana	Arkansas	SC Region
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	\$23,405,927	\$ 7,379,200	\$ 5,870,000	\$ 6,918,000	\$ 43,929,500
Ground Water/Surface Water (EQIP)	\$ 5,902,845	\$ 773,700	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 2,162,500
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	\$ 257,719	\$ 475,351	\$ 435,003	\$ 487,412	\$ 1,697,863
Wetlands Reserve Program	\$ 8,550,000	\$ 5,725,300	\$20,987,000	\$25,163,500	\$ 60,425,800
Emergency Watershed Protection Program	\$10,769,213	\$ 8,251,750	\$ 1,903,400	\$ 4,536,000	\$ 25,460,363
(Other programs not identified)	\$ 3,590,780	\$ 2,242,867	\$ 365,521	\$ 773,483	\$ 11,087,945
Totals	\$52,476,484	\$24,848,168	\$29,560,924	\$37,878,395	\$144,763,971



Electronic Field Office Technical Guides

The Field Office Technical Guide is the primary NRCS reference, containing technical information about soil, water, air, plant and animal conservation.

The guide is localized for specific geographic areas, making its use practical for the entire agency. It is currently being converted to electronic format available on the Internet, increasing both internal and external availability of the data.

As part of the SmarTech initiative, Texas served as the pilot state for the South Central Region and received training in how to populate eFOTG. The population of eFOTG for all states in the SCR is approximately 90-95 percent complete. Phase I will be completely populated by March 15, 2003. For more information:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg

West Texas Telecommunication Project

The West Texas Telecommunication Project (WTTP) is being designed to increase program delivery effectiveness. The project will provide opportunities and training electronically.

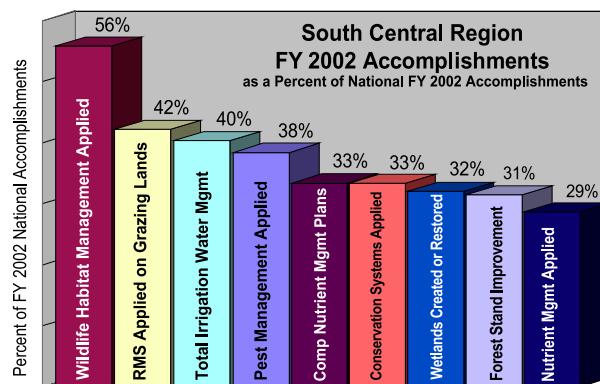
One of the agency's major workload issues in successful program delivery is the processing and tracking of conservation program applications and contracts. The goal of the WTTP is to integrate various USDA databases and provide consumer-friendly access for both participants and personnel.

This multi-agency project uses a partnership of grassroots and non-profit organizations to provide training and outreach necessary for successful implementation.

Accountability & Performance

The financial investment in conservation programs can be connected directly to conservation applied on the land. The table below illustrates acres of Conservation Systems Applied for select programs. This includes the performance measures Lands Benefited and Resource Management Systems Applied for FY 2002 in the South Central Region.

Acres of Conservation Systems Applied - FY 2002					
	EWP	EQIP	GW/SW	WRP	WHIP
Arkansas	939	104,676	325	15,838	345
Louisiana	676	116,217		7,164	1,877
Oklahoma	4,539	234,662	311	2,379	16,861
Texas	776	1,883,574	1,146	400	15,117
Totals	6,930	2,339,129	1,782	25,781	34,200



Although only one of six regions, the South Central Region was responsible for up to 56 percent of the national total for conservation applied in several key areas.

Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE2)

In preparation for implementing RUSLE2, South Central Region state technical staff went above and beyond expectations to populate the data-intensive model. All state agronomists in the South Central Region have received training on the RUSLE2 erosion prediction model. The national rollout of RUSLE2 to all field units in the region will begin in the second quarter of FY 2003.

GLCI Receives USDA Honor Award

Congratulations to the National Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) Steering Committee, which received the USDA Honor Award for Excellence in Conservation *"for significant contributions to improving grazing land management by providing technical assistance to conserve privately-owned grazing lands."*

GLCI's success is attributed to the many hours volunteered by committee members. The South Central Region is extremely fortunate and proud to be represented by the following committee members:

- Bob Drake, Oklahoma
- John "Chip" Merrill, Texas
- James "Rooter" Brite, Texas
- John Spain, Arkansas
- Jack Cutshall, Louisiana
- Bob McCan, Texas
- Dr. C. Pat Bagley, Texas



NRCS Chief Bruce Knight (l) presents award to Bob Drake, National GLCI Chair (r)

Capacity Building

Both the US-Mexico Border Coalition of RC&D Councils and the Texas-Mexico Community Based Organization held capacity building workshops for their directors and community leaders. These workshops addressed issues and concerns common to the border, in addition to providing leadership training.

Southwest States RC&D

LeRoy Dangeau from Wynne, Arkansas was elected President of the Southwest States RC&D Association at their annual meeting in Hutchinson, Kansas. Mr. Dangeau has been active in the RC&D program for many years at the local, state, regional, and national levels. He currently serves on the national RC&D board and is also a state legislator. Other officers from the South Central Region include: Jim Bailey, Pawhuska, Oklahoma, 1st VP; Annette Gutierrez, El Paso, Texas, Secretary; Glen Williams, Winnsboro, Louisiana, Treasurer.

The Southwest Association has completed a review and revision of their by-laws, working toward obtaining 501 (c) 3 status, and improving their communications network. The next meeting will be held in conjunction with the National RC&D meeting in San Antonio, Texas, July 2003.

Tribal Advisory Council Formed

Implementation of RD-410 Tribal Conservation Advisory Council, with 39 federally recognized tribes in Oklahoma has been formed. The process has been initiated in Texas with completion planned for early 2003.

Watershed Work Receives Recognition

Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating presented the Governor's Commendation to the Oklahoma Watershed Inspection Team for *"outstanding service to the State by making Oklahoma among the first in the Nation to complete field reviews of all 2,098 small watershed upstream flood control structures."*



The joint efforts of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, local conservation district employees, conservation district directors and board members and NRCS resulted in the project's completion in less than one year.

The South Central Region contains 42 percent of the watershed project dams in the nation; and Oklahoma contains 47 percent of the regional total. Rehabilitation of these structures, including inspections, identifying sponsors and establishing cost estimates, is a top priority in the South Central Region.

Partners Develop Farm Bill Implementation Plan

In a historic, collaborative effort, the South Central Region Conservation Partnership, developed the first regional Farm Bill Implementation Plan. A Leadership Forum in Amarillo, Texas provided the foundation for the plan.



Representatives from each partner organization participated in a panel discussion emphasizing communication, cooperation and collaboration as three keys to successful partnerships. Participants also used a facilitated discussion to reach consensus on key issues and outcomes facing the partnership in the next year.

West Texas Educational & Training Outreach Project

The primary purpose and goal of this project is to educate and train USDA customers along a 37-county area from Laredo to El Paso in the use of eGovernment as an effective and efficient means of doing business with USDA. This educational and outreach component of the larger West Texas Telecommunication Project includes a broad partnership to provide the oversight and expertise necessary for successful implementation.



Lower Mississippi Valley Initiative

The South Central Region led the charge to organize the Lower Mississippi Valley Initiative by appointing Wil Fontenot as the program coordinator in September 2002. Louisiana's Governor Mike Foster sent a letter to his counterparts throughout the watershed encouraging their support of this very important initiative.